

Council Members:

With the Corrections Advisory Council's meeting barely a week off, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for agreeing to serve in this vital capacity. The Montana Department of Corrections will be relying on the council for advice, direction and guidance as it deals with a host of significant issues facing Montana's prison, community corrections, juvenile corrections, and probation and parole systems.

You will find enclosed some materials that I hope will be helpful in understanding, in advance of the meeting, some of the issues that will come before the council. The packet includes a summary of statistics regarding the Youth Services Division within the department and offender population data.

You will notice the packet also includes an updated agenda, which includes the addition of a brief discussion of the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act and its effects on Montana. This act, passed by Congress in 2003, imposes requirements on state and local governments under threat of losing federal funds.

It mandates development of standards for detection, prevention, reduction and punishment of prison rape; and collection of data on the incidence of prison rape. The law also provides for grants to state and local governments to implement the act.

I realize this is a lot of information to review and absorb, and that you will face a blizzard of additional information at the meeting. Rest assured, I understand that some of you may feel overwhelmed at first. I have been with the department about 10 weeks and have struggled myself to learn about aspects of corrections I never knew existed. Perhaps the position in which I find myself will aid in our efforts to make the information we pass on to you as understandable as possible.

Again, thank you for your public service. We look forward to seeing you in Helena. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or email me at banez@mt.gov.

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